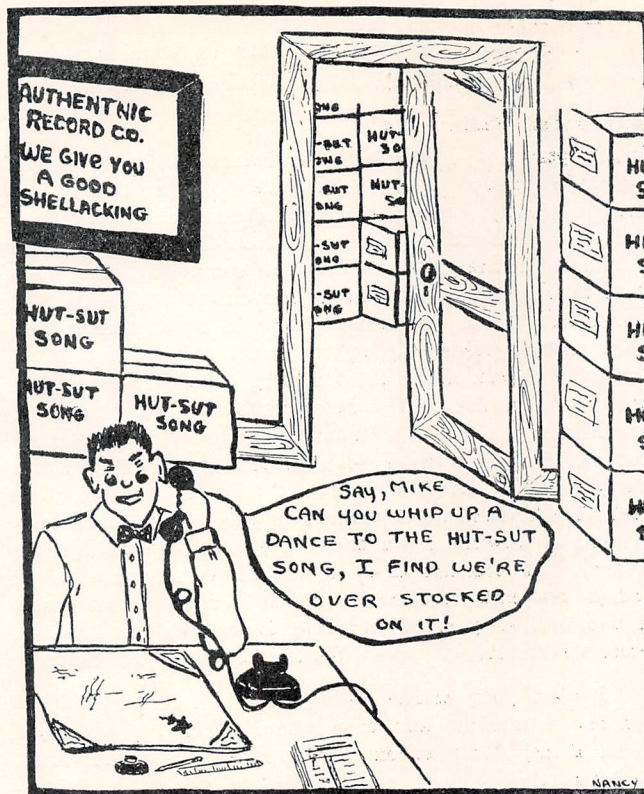


THE BIRTH OF A NEW "FOLK DANCE"



Nancy Borgman of Minnesota's ROUNDUP ably portrays another reason why so many new American Round Dances are appearing on the market at the present time -- over stocked or a bad seller.



FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE CALIFORNIAN DANCE FEDERATION

My dear Vyts:

It was with a feeling of great warmth that I read your article in the December 1950 issue of "Viltis", where you dwelt on the subject "Wha Hoppen" To the Square Dance?

I cannot tell you how grateful I am that you took the trouble to find out about the folk dance situation here in California and found that we sincere students of folk dance and earnest teachers are not entirely at fault.

As I stop occasionally to sit back and look at our situation thru impartial eyes, I find that a great change has taken place in the activity in recent years and I'm afraid it is due to the sudden surge in popularity of the American Square Dance.

In California, of course, I believe that our folk dance movement will for the most part, be mostly recreational. It seems to me that there is much more chance for individual expression in the pattern dances which must be learned than there will ever be in the square dances which are done to a certain set of calls. In other words, I feel that folk dancing is a dancer's art and square dancing is a caller's art. As a result, all of these composed dances that have been flooding the field recently are endeavors on the part of individuals to express themselves or I might better say, show off their ability to create something to add to their prestige as

a dance composer, or, more often, caller.

For myself, I enjoy calling very much, however, I prefer teaching a folk dance to teaching a square dance because I like to give people the background of what went to make up the dance, and while I do not have too much time for research into the background of the many dances, I do always try to find some little thing of interest to give my classes so that they will get a little of the appreciation that I have felt for the dance when I learned it.

I am afraid that the terrific American habit of making money will for a long time be paramount in all our thinking, or shall I say lack of thinking. I am afraid that is part of the education we have had in this country for many years past, for our business and family lives have become so complex. The average American, as you must realize Vyts, is a fadist and when something new and different is offered to him, he promptly picks it up with all of his enthusiasm, gets the most he can out of it, and almost as quickly drops it for something else new.

I find considerable anxiety expressed by many of our leaders out here in California over the terrific pressure that is put upon them to teach the "new" dances as they come along. I feel that the time is rapidly approaching when the leaders themselves will tire of this pressure and work actively against the constant introduction of the so-called "new" dances. I feel that all we can do for the time being, Vyts, is to be patient and let the movement really find its own roots.

I'd like to talk to you now about some of the particular things mentioned in your article. In the fifth and sixth paragraphs where you speak of the type of material that is made available to those who go to a camp to learn, you bring out the fact that, if it is possible for so-called ten day wonders to throw a lot of composed material at the dancers and if, on the other hand, bonifide dancing schools, having a good background of dancing could do a better job of giving dancers a better style in their dancing then why should folk dancers attend a camp. I believe that there is more to a camp than just learning dancing, Vyts. I am sure you will agree with me that the spirit of friendliness and good fellowship that is so readily apparent at the Stockton Camp is one of the big features of the Camp. You must remember that we are young yet in our activity out here in California, we are eager as I have mentioned before, perhaps overly so in many things, but in this particular camp we have met people from all over the United States and from foreign countries as well, we have learned to tolerate and even understand and even their approaches to the way they feel about the movement. Those who have come to us from other areas have found that we aren't too bad a sort. The thing that I am trying to get over to you is, that while some of the material that is given to us at camp, most certainly is not worth while and quite certainly the art of dancing might be learned much more readily in one's own locality, yet, on the other hand, the terrific feeling of fellowship that is evident at Folk Dance Camp is one of the reasons a person should go to camp of such nature.

I was very much interested in the points you brought up in the eighth paragraph about folk dancing being banned as immoral in certain communities. This is most interesting reaction and I am wondering what is behind it. You know, out here in California, one of the leading churches that has always made a point of banning dancing of any kind, has actually gotten behind the folk dance movement and has actually sponsored the movement because of the enjoyment that it gives to its members. I would be very interested to know just what

is behind this particular community's ban of which you speak. I can see on the other hand, the reason for the Education Department in the New York State having withdrawn its funds and the encouragement of folk dancing, because of its "uselessness". We have had some reactions this way out here in California too, by some of the people in the Department of Education, feeling that the classes are not educational but are almost purely recreational. There again I feel that the square dance popularity is responsible for this reaction. I feel that we have more education to do in the folk dance field than is possible in the square dance field, simply because of the fact that square dancing is purely recreational dancing in the execution of figures given by the caller while the folk dance field does delve into the backgrounds and the whys and wherefores and the relation of the dance and the activities of the people.

I know that one of the big thrills I get in folk dancing, is one moment being a Scandinavian doing Moskrosor and the next moment feeling the suppressed elation and sorrow that I cannot help feeling when I dance the "Nigun" mixer that you gave us this year, and the next moment being a lightfooted more or less stodgy Englishman "Gathering Peascods" or feeling a song in my heart with the "Tarantella". That is the wonderful thing about true folk dancing.

Well, Vyts, I have rambled on quite a bit about a subject that is very close to me, but I wanted to let you know how good I felt after having read your article, that you had put this down so that others who are sincere workers in the field could read it and digest it. It made me feel good that you thought better of us here in Northern California than I gathered from your earlier issue when you gave us a well deserved scolding. I felt very much hurt when I read your article mentioned at first until such time as I had put myself in your shoes as an "outsider" coming in and looking at us once a year as you do; the changes you saw at camp must have been very startling to you whereas they have crept up on us gradually. At any rate, you have put both stories before us and I must say that I will give you any encouragement that I can about the good work.

Happy Dancing,
George Murton, Jr.
President, Northern Section
Folk Dance Federation of California

From Ed Durlacher

Dear Vyts: ----- Have just read "Wha Hoppen" to the Square Dance" and enjoyed your thoughts very much. Square dancing IS facing a serious condition of which many of us who are vitally interested in it for its wholesome recreation are very concerned. Reports coming into my office tell of it falling off rapidly.

As you so very well put it in your article we have so very many who know so little who attempt to teach so MUCH of what they know so LITTLE of. I shall never forget having breakfast with four people who had just come back from Shaw's class. One was describing one of the dances taught and each one of them had a very different version of it. Each of them was from a different section of the country so that meant FOUR versions of the SAME dance.

To me there is only one way to save what we have and use it as a foundation to re-build. That is for those of us, and there are a goodly number, who wish to keep this field in the public domain is to form a group to exchange ideas in what we are doing in our own section in building interest and what we can do together.

This does not mean a hard and fast organization or federation with officers and such. It is a group who each

two months will set down on paper a report, send it to a central place for mimeographing and each member receives a copy.

Once again my congratulations on your aarticle.

Sincerely, Ed Durlacher.Freeport, N.Y.

And From Walter Grothe

Dear Vyts - - - A word on your recent article in VILTIS "What Happened to the Square Dance". One thing pleased me greatly, namely, that you released and openly stated that we Northern California folk dancers are not to be blamed entirely for the trend in composing dances, but it is mostly the square dance movement which brought about this trend. I personally like to square dance and have enjoyed taking up square dance calling, but I feel similarly to you about the tendency toward commercialism and abuse in the square dance movement, and many of our Northern California leaders revolt against the composed dances which have been presented recently. From many reports which I received, there is an indication that the terrific development in the square dance movement is slowing down and I hope that we shall enter a period of consolidation. After all, American squares are just a small fraction of the folk dance picture and it has been a part of our folk dance movement ever since we started.

Walter Grothe. San Francisco

I read your article "Wha Hoppen". It sure expressed my sentiments and then some! Sorry I did not jot down all my observations of composed dances. It would be interesting to point out specific faults in form of composition and construction, source of figures (European folk dances) and the fact that so many dances called waltzes have no waltz figures or only four measures in the entire dance. This is no doubt due to the fact that the choreographers are two-steppers. The Flying Trapeze — with changes on each measure is a stimulating exercise in mental gymnastics. Enough of that — you said it all and very admirably.

Olga Kulbitsky, Hunter College, N. Y.

NOT OFTEN ENOUGH?!!!!

Dear Vyts — There is one disadvantage to VILTIS — it doesn't come out often enough — for readers. I'm sure that from where you stand it comes around to publishing time pretty fast.

"Wha Hoppen" — you know one very peculiar thing is that the leaders themselves are crying the same story yet they go right ahead and do the things they are so worried and upset about. I don't see why they can't stand up by the strength of their convictions. Maybe it's inevitable with those who are new in folk dancing and that in a few years there will be a saner approach by leaders.

Erma Weir — DeLake, Ore.

After having read your first article on Mexico in the December issue of VILTIS I am compelled to congratulate you on your most authentic account of conditions there.

Chester Buchanan — Chicago, Ill.

I've always intended to tell you how much I enjoy your magazine. The reports of folk dance festivals are especially valuable. I think they should be reprinted for wider circulation.

Lynn Rohrbough — Delaware, Ohio

"Well, we've learned this much: During inflation money still talks, but it doesn't say much."